concluded with a Statement of Conclusions jointly signed with the Chief Minister of the State concerned, laying out the points of action on which the State would move to operationalise the recommendations of the Round Tables.

Grants from foreign countries for Panchayats

2977. SHRI GIREESH KUMAR SANGHI: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether his Ministry has any plan to seek grants from foreign countries for the development of Panchayats; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) As at present, no such plans have been finalized.

Establishment of rural business hubs

†2978. SHRI SURENDRA LATH:
SHRIKRIPAL PARMAR:
SHRI R.S. GAVAI:

Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have prepared an action plan to establish rural business hubs;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the names of States identified for developing rural business hubs;

(d) whether States will be provided financial assistance for establishing; rural business hubs;

(e) if so, the details thereof; and

(f) by when these hubs are likely to be establish?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj and

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) are working together to facilitate building linkages between Panchayats, Industries and business to create Rural Business Hubs (RBH) in different blocks of the country on the lines of the successful Thai experience of One Tambon One Product (OTOP). Rural Business Hubs will be a Public-Private-Panchayat Partnership to produce/improve/refine goods from locally available resources to enable larger market access. A joint RBH Council, comprising representatives of the Government and CII and eminent individuals working in this area, has been constituted for monitoring the process and reviewing the actions.

At the initial phase, only one product from one Block Panchayat of all the States will be selected for setting up of RBH. The State Governments with the help of Panchayats and Cll will identify the potential product which will be promoted covering every facet starting from product development to sales, with the focus on creating value addition and securing better prices. In the 'second stage, a Task Force of key stakeholders and resource personnel will be set up for ensuring development of the RBH in a set time frame. The Task Force will envaluate the product and prepare strategy for ensuring quality, better pricing and market access.

(c) This initiative of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj was initially limited to nine states, to start with, as the newly formed Ministry of Panchayati Raj was taking shape and there was a shortage of officers and staff to follow up. These States were selected on the basis of initial response and interest shown by the states. The initiative has since been extended to all States/UTs covered by Part IX of the Constitution.

(d) and (e) The financing of Rural Business Hubs is envisaged as a business proposition on the public-private-panchayat-partnership principle which will be supported by such 'top-up' funds as may be available for the purpose. Assistance is also envisaged from specialized institutions like NABARD, SIDBI, the Institution of Engineers in the form of finance, professional and technical guidance to panchayats for identifying and setting up RBHs.

(f) The process of setting up of RBHs has already begun with the signing of three Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the States of

Uttaranchal and Haryana. The first MOU under the RBH initiative was signed in Dehra Dun (Uttaranchal) for setting up a rural business hub for processing fruit grown in the Ramgarh block and few other Blocks of Nainital District. Thereafter, three more MOUs have been finalized and signed to set up RBHs for Jatropha plantation and production of bio-diesel in Faridabad and Mewat Districts of Haryana and Dungarpur District of Rajasthan. Subsequent to an advertisement in certain leading newspapers, over 150 responses have been received from Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and individuals. A conclave of all the stakeholders involved in the development of bio-diesel from Jatropha, through Panchayats under the RBH initiative of the Ministry, was held on 5th November, 2005. In this conclave, which was attended by 100 PRI representatives from all over the country, it was decided to set up a joint committee of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas and Planning Commission alongwith the stakeholders including scientists and other corporate, for the development of Bio-Fuels through Panchayats under the RBH initiative. The RBH initiative is also scheduled to be discussed in the next meeting of the Council of States Ministers on Panchayati Raj.

Status of Chairpersons of Zilla Panchayats

2979. SHRI SHANTARAM LAXMAN NAIK: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Chairpersons of Zilla Panchayats in various States in the country have been conferred with the Status of Ministers/Minister of States;

(b) if so, the names of such States;

(c) whether it is a fact that District Collectors do not accord necessary respect and co-operation to the Chairpersons in some States;

(d) whether Government have received such complaints; and

(e) if so, the action taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) According to the available information, the States of Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttaranchal and West Bengal have conferred the status of Minister of State on the Chairpersons of Zilla Panchayats.